

MARITAL RELATIONS AND PARENTAL BELIEFS IN OPEN ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

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Almost all studies on parent-child relations in developmental psychology have implicitly assumed that the relations are derived from childbirth, although our changing society makes it impossible to define them only by means of kinship. Adoption is a typical example of a parent-child relationship where there is no blood relation between the parent and child.

This study investigates the psychological quality of marital relations and parental beliefs on child-rearing in open adoptive parents and thus addresses the implication of family functioning, especially that of open adoption. Open adoption is defined as "the sharing of information and/or contacts between the adoptive and birthparents of an adopted child, before and/or after the placement of the child, and perhaps continuing for the life of the child" (Berry, 1993, p. 126). Openness in adoption is the procedures designed to reassure birthparents about their child's well-being and encourage the development of adoptive parents' empathy and acceptance of the birthparents (McRoy *et al.*, 1988, p. 15). Moreover several studies verify that openness in adoption can make the adoptees understand their real world as it is and thus avoid identity diffusion caused by a difficult effort to search for their birthparent in childhood, adolescence or early adulthood (Baran and Pannor, 1990, Brozinsky and Schechter, 1990, Brozinsky *et al.*, 1995, Demick, 1993, Fergusson *et al.*, 1995, Goodman *et al.*, 1997, Grotevant *et al.*, 1994).

In Japan adoption is generally conducted to conserve the family lineage/name; since the first son is traditionally the only heir, couples adopt a male as their son if they are infertile or only have a daughter. In 1987, however, a new institution called "Special Adoption Act" placing much emphasis on children's welfare rather than family lineage, was started in order to provide genuine parents for very young children exposed to impoverished circumstances. Since then 5542 children have been adopted over nine years under this act.

This is the first psychological study addressing open adoptive families in our country, and it was conducted with the assistance of an agency located in Tokyo. The purpose is to investigate two empirical

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hypotheses; (1) marital relations of adoptive parents are better than those of birth parents and (2) adoptive parents are eager to carry on their child-rearing in more positive and non-traditional ways than their counterparts.

Method

Participants: The participants in this study included 43 adoptive fathers and 43 adoptive mothers who were recruited with the assistance of a private adoption agency named Wa-no-kai (Motherly Network). 27 pairs had one adopted child, 14 pairs had two adopted children, and 2 pairs had three adopted children through Wa-no-kai; children were between the ages of 0–36 months at the time of adoptive placement and were between the ages of 0.1–8.9 years at the time of the study. Mean age of the fathers ranging between 29–44 years, is 37.67 years old. Mean age of the mothers ranging between 30–41 years, is 35.42 years old. None of the parents had their biological children. Children adopted internationally were not included in the sample. 46.5% of the fathers were college graduates and 46.5% were high school/junior college graduates. 18.6% of the mothers were college graduates and 74.4% were high school/junior college graduates.

Procedures: Wa-no-kai mailed questionnaires prepared by the authors to the participants and collected the questionnaire completed by each couple. The battery of instruments consisted of the following:

1. Background information: A brief questionnaire asked each participant mother for demographic and related information (e.g., family constellation, number of adopted children, age and sex of each child, the age of adoptive placement, expectancy of further adoption etc.)

2. Marital relations: Marital Love Scale (Sugawara and Takuma, 1997) was used. The MLS is a 15-item questionnaire that measures cognition, affection, and behavior in marital relations. Each item lists four statements, scored 1 through 4, in order of increasing degree. Parents rate each item for how they experienced their relations before and after placing the child.

3. Parental beliefs: Parental Beliefs on Child-Rearing (Ohno, Kashiwagi, Wakamatsu and Okamatsu, 1996) were used. PBCR consists of a 30-item questionnaire that measures parental perceptions of the purpose, feelings and personal influence on child-rearing. Each item lists four statements, scored 1 through 4, in order of increasing degree. Parents rate each item for how they experienced daily child-rearing.

4. Additional questions: Telling (information disclosure to adopted child), motivation for adoption, infertility treatment and opinion about recent various reproduction treatments, etc.

Data analysis: Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation was conducted to determine the structure of interrelations among the 15 items in MLS and independently among the 30 items in PBCR. We deleted two items from PBCR in order to upgrade its internal consistency. Table 1 shows 15 items and their loading scores for MLS, and Table 2 shows 26 items and their loading scores for PBCR. Internal consistency scores are also shown in each table.

Significant loading on Factor 1 of MLS consisted of 5 items that represent psychological closeness with spouse, on Factor 2 of 4 items that represent psychological acceptance of spouse, on Factor 3 of 3 items that represent positive regard for spouse, and on Factor 4 of 3 items that represent a strong need for the spouse's presence (togetherness). Significant loading on Factor 1 of PBCR consisted of 9 items that represent the parents' positive attitude toward child-rearing, on Factor 2 of 6 items

Table 1. Factor loadings, cumulative percentage of variance explained and alpha index for marital relations items.

	Close- ness	Accept- ance	Positive regard	Together- ness
My husband (wife) and I still feel like lovers.	.733			
My husband (wife) and I both feel that we were destined for each others.	.692			
When together with my husband (wife), I feel truly in love with him (her).	.654			
It feels natural for my husband (wife) and I to be together.	.615			
My husband (wife) understands my feelings even when I don't put them into words.	.393			
I can forgive my husband (wife) for anything.		.781		
I want to stand by my husband (wife) no matter what.		.743		
I feel I can do anything if it is for my husband (wife).		.672		
My most important concern is for my husband (wife) to be happy.		.528		
I depend on my husband (wife).			.774	
I deeply respect my husband (wife) as a person.			.713	
I find my husband (wife) attractive as a man (woman).			.584	
I will be in trouble if my husband (wife) is not there.				.792
It is difficult to live without my husband (wife).				.741
I always want to understand my husband's (wife's) opinions and feelings.				.626
Cumulative percentage of variance explained	34.0	45.0	53.6	61.1
α index	.722	.713	.696	.704

Table 2. Factor loadings, cumulative percentage of variance explained and alpha index for parental beliefs items.

	Valu- able work	Labo- rious- ness	Mainte- nance of lineage	Nature of human- kind	Self-en- richment
My child is my reason for living.	.754				
My children give me spiritual strength.	.656				
It makes me sad to think that as children grow older, they grow farther apart from their parents.	.648				
Life for me would be pretty dull without children.	.587				
The most important thing to me is my child.	.580				
I am one, body and soul, with my child.	.505				
I find satisfaction in being a parent.	.458				
Children strengthen the ties of the family (bond between husband and wife).	.452				
Raising children is the most important goal of my life.	.451				
I want to be liberated from my child.		.726			
Raising children is a burden.		.683			
I can find no mental peace since having my children.		.682			
I can understand how some people become neurotic when raising children.		.635			
I feel irritated that I cannot do the things I want because I have a child.		.626			
My actions are limited, because I am a parent.		.597			
I want my child to carry on my dreams.			.742		
My child will carry on my ambitions.			.733		
Children are necessary for carrying on the family (protecting the family lineage).			.504		
Children carry on my life.			.462		
My child is proof of my existence in this world.				.670	
It is important to raise children responsible as the next generation to uphold society.				.663	
As a human being, it is natural to raise a child.				.610	
By becoming a parent, I was acknowledged by society for the first time.				.506	
Along with my child's development, I have also grown.					.809
I feel uplifted when watching my children.					.635
I feel assured that my child will be there when I grow old.					.457
Cumulative percentage of variance explained	22.7	35.0	42.3	48.6	53.7
α index	.813	.760	.665	.662	.531

that represent laboriousness of child-rearing (parents' perception of their child-rearing as laborious), on Factor 3 of 4 items that represent maintenance of family lineage (parents' perception of the child as a person to preserve their family lineage), on Factor 4 of 4 items that represent the nature of humankind (parents' perception of child-rearing as a natural part of humankind), and on Factor 5 of 3 items that represent self-enrichment (parents' perception of child-rearing as a step toward self-enrichment).

Results

1. Marital relations in adoptive parents

1) Comparison between adoptive parents and birth parents

In Table 3 and 4, means, standard deviations and *F*-value of one-way ANOVA for the items show significant differences between adoptive parents and birth parents. All ratings by adoptive parents were higher

Table 3. Comparison of marital relations between adoptive mothers and birth mothers.

	Adoptive mothers		Birth mothers		ANOVA <i>F</i> -Value
	M	SD	M	SD	
It is difficult to live without my husband.	5.88	(1.38)	5.13	(1.79)	7.23**
I always want to understand my husband's opinions and feelings.	5.60	(1.14)	5.15	(1.41)	4.19*
I want to stand by my husband no matter what.	5.74	(.90)	5.10	(1.48)	7.90**
I deeply respect my husband as a person.	5.91	(.95)	5.28	(1.40)	8.07**
I will be in trouble if my husband is not there.	6.40	(1.14)	5.69	(1.23)	9.20**
I depend on my husband.	6.42	(.85)	5.79	(1.30)	9.60**
I find my husband attractive as a man.	5.33	(1.11)	4.89	(1.39)	4.03*
When together with my husband, I feel truly in love with him.	5.47	(1.16)	4.80	(1.45)	8.40**
My husband and I both feel that we were destined for each others.	4.95	(1.77)	4.26	(1.50)	8.01**
It feels natural for my husband and I to be together.	6.07	(.94)	5.31	(1.42)	11.61**

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Table 4. Comparison of marital relations between adoptive fathers and birth fathers.

	Adoptive fathers		Birth fathers		ANOVD <i>F</i> -Value
	M	SD	M	SD	
I want to stand by my wife no matter what.	5.79	(1.12)	5.34	(1.36)	4.39*
I depend on my wife.	6.19	(.85)	5.59	(1.31)	8.51**

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

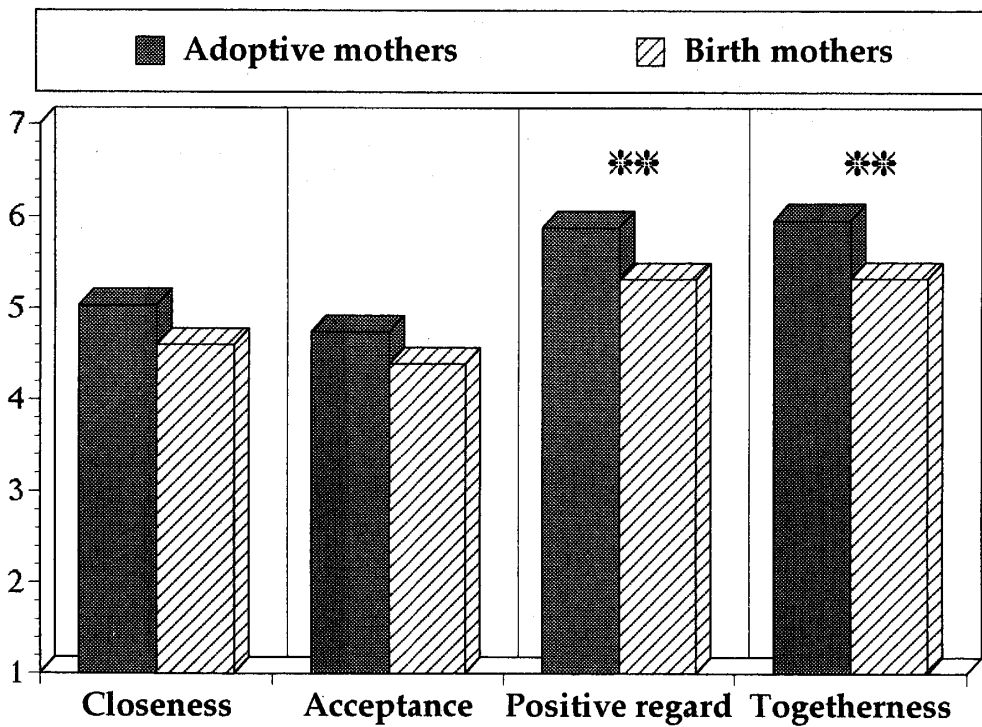


Fig. 1. Four factors of marital relations in adoptive mothers and birth mothers.

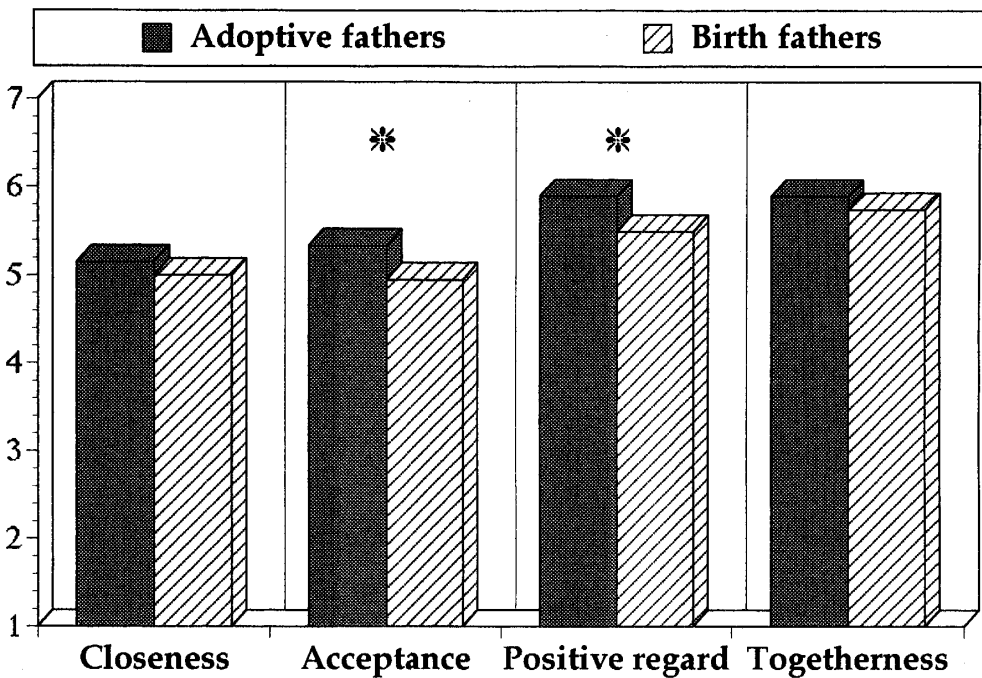


Fig. 2. Four factors of marital relations in adoptive fathers and birth fathers.

than their counterparts.

Fig. 1 and 2 showed the means of 4 factor scores estimated by Principal Component Analysis for adoptive parents and birth parents.

Adoptive mothers scored significantly higher than birth mothers on the factor indicating positive regard for spouse ($F=8.86, p<.01$) and the factor indicating comfortable feeling of togetherness ($F=8.75, p<.01$). On the other hand, adoptive fathers showed significantly higher than birth fathers on the factor indicating acceptance for spouse ($F=4.60, p<.05$) and the factor indicating positive regard to spouse ($F=5.67, p<.05$).

2) Comparison between both adoptive parents

All mean scores of four items by adoptive fathers (having concern for spouse's happiness, forgiving spouse for anything, doing anything for spouse and feeling like lovers) shown in Table 5 were significantly higher than those of adoptive mothers. Since three of four items be-

Table 5. Comparison of marital relations between adoptive mothers and fathers.

	Adoptive mothers		Adoptive fathers		ANOVA F-Value
	M	SD	M	SD	
My most important concern is for my wife (husband) to be happy.	5.00	(1.07)	5.74	(1.05)	10.62**
I can forgive my wife (husband) for anything.	3.30	(1.44)	4.19	(1.40)	8.32**
I feel I can do anything if it is for my wife (husband).	4.91	(1.09)	5.58	(.96)	9.32**
My wife (husband) and I still feel like lovers.	3.86	(1.78)	4.72	(1.20)	6.90*

** $p<.01$; * $p<.05$.

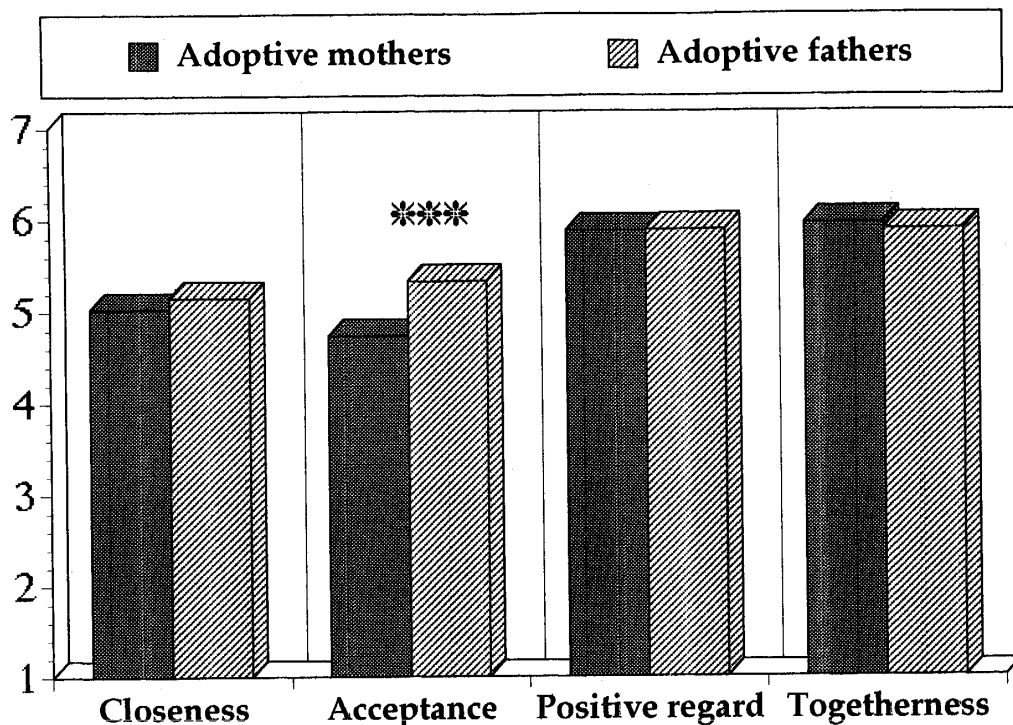


Fig. 3. Four factors of marital relations in adoptive mothers and adoptive fathers.

longed to the acceptance factor, adoptive fathers showed significantly higher ($F=11.26, p<.001$) score on its mean as shown in Fig. 3.

3) Comparison between before and after placement of the adopted child

As shown in Table 6 and 7, marital satisfaction of adoptive parents strengthened after they adopted their child.

2. Parental beliefs on child-rearing

1) Comparison between adoptive mothers and birth mothers

In Table 8, means, standard deviations and F -value of one-way ANOVA for the items shown significant differences between adoptive mothers and birth mothers. 10 of 26 items indicated higher scores by adoptive mothers, and for the rest of the items higher scores by birth mothers. One-way ANOVA of mean scores of each factor indicated significant differences on three of five factors. Adoptive mothers view their child-rearing as valuable work ($F=4.89, p<.05$) in their daily lives as shown in Fig. 4. On the other hand, birth mothers view their child-rearing as laborious ($F=3.89, p<.05$) and necessary to carry on their family lineage ($F=9.13, p<.01$).

2) Comparison between both adoptive parents

In Table 9, means, standard deviations and F -value of one-way ANOVA for the items of parental belief on child-rearing shown significant differences between adoptive mothers and fathers. Adoptive mothers had higher scores on these items: "although my child, he/she has a separate existence from myself", "the economic burden of raising children is large" and "my children give me spiritual strength". Adoptive fathers had higher scores on these items: "I feel uplifted when watching my children", "children are necessary for carrying on the family (protecting the family lineage)" and "it is important to raise children responsible

Table 6. Change of marital satisfaction in adoptive mothers.

	Much stronger	A little stronger	Can't tell
Happy	29.3% (N=12)	43.9% (N=18)	19.5% (N=8)
Neutral	0.0%	2.4% (N=1)	2.4% (N=1)
Unhappy	0.0%	0.0%	2.4% (N=1)

Table 7. Change of marital satisfaction in adoptive fathers.

	Much stronger	A little stronger	Can't tell
Happy	20.9% (N=9)	46.5% (N=20)	23.3% (N=10)
Neutral	0.0%	4.7% (N=2)	2.3% (N=1)
Unhappy	0.0%	0.0%	2.3% (N=1)

Table 8. Comparison of parental beliefs on childrearing between adoptive mothers and birth mothers.

	Adoptive mothers		Birth mothers		ANOVA
	M	SD	M	SD	F-value
Children are necessary for carrying on the family (protecting the family lineage).	1.67	(.71)	2.01	(.82)	6.46*
I am one, body and soul, with my child.	2.19	(.88)	2.48	(.90)	3.98*
Children carry on one's life.	2.09	(.78)	2.46	(.84)	7.60**
My actions are limited, because I am a parent.	2.74	(.62)	3.01	(.76)	4.82*
By becoming a parent, I was acknowledged by society for the first time.	1.93	(.96)	2.25	(.85)	5.23*
I want to be liberated from my child.	2.28	(.88)	2.56	(.81)	4.56*
Raising children is a burden.	1.67	(.75)	2.04	(.76)	8.61**
I want my child to carry on my dreams.	1.60	(.66)	1.86	(.75)	4.49*
I can find no mental peace since having my children.	1.79	(.83)	2.16	(.83)	7.60**
I feel uplifted when watching my children.	3.81	(.39)	3.55	(.57)	8.54**
It is important to raise children responsible as the next generation to uphold society.	3.14	(.94)	2.60	(.88)	14.20***
Although my child, he/she has a separate existence from myself.	3.84	(.37)	3.46	(.68)	12.54***
I find satisfaction in being a parent.	3.72	(.45)	3.23	(.71)	19.23***
My children give me spiritual strength.	3.49	(.55)	3.17	(.71)	7.89**
I can understand how some people become neurotic when raising children.	2.84	(.84)	2.53	(.79)	5.70*
Raising children is the most important goal of my life.	2.95	(.79)	2.35	(.89)	17.87***
I am looking forward to when my children leave their nest.	3.42	(.59)	3.02	(.66)	14.02***
I like myself as a parent.	3.02	(.74)	2.43	(.70)	27.15***

***: $p < .001$; **: $p < .01$; *: $p < .05$.

as the next generation to uphold society". One-way ANOVA, however, did not show any significant difference on 5 factor scores between the two groups shown in Fig. 5.

3. Correlation of factors between marital relations and parental beliefs

Table 10 indicates rank order correlation between extracted factors of marital relations and those of parental beliefs on child-rearing. In the case of adoptive mothers acceptance of the husband positively correlated with estimation of child-rearing as valuable, and positive regard of the husband negatively correlated with the estimation of child-rearing

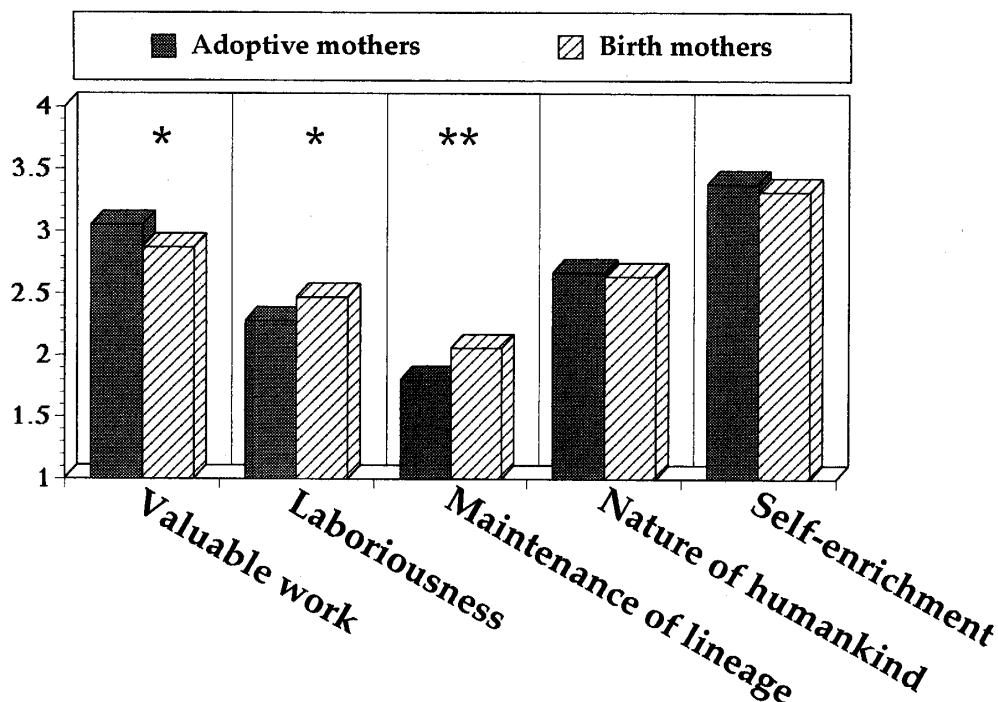


Fig. 4. Five factors of parental beliefs in adoptive mothers and birth mothers.

Table 9. Comparison of parental beliefs on childrearing between adoptive mothers and fathers.

	Adoptive mothers		Adoptive fathers		ANOVA <i>F</i> -value
	M	SD	M	SD	
I feel uplifted when watching my children.	3.81	(.39)	3.95	(.21)	4.18*
Children are necessary for carrying on the family (protecting the family lineage).	1.67	(.71)	2.07	(.70)	6.68*
It is important to raise children responsible as the next generation to uphold society.	3.14	(.94)	3.51	(.63)	5.24*
Although my child, he/she has a separate existence from myself.	3.84	(.37)	3.49	(.70)	8.26**
The economic burden of raising children is large.	2.98	(.56)	2.64	(.79)	5.09*
My children give me spiritual strength.	3.49	(.55)	3.21	(.61)	4.76*

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

as laborious. In the case of adoptive fathers the closeness and acceptance of the wife positively correlated with the estimation of child-rearing as valuable, closeness to the wife negatively correlated with the estimation of child-rearing as laborious, and closeness to and positive regard for the wife positively correlated with the estimation of child-rearing as a step to self-growth.

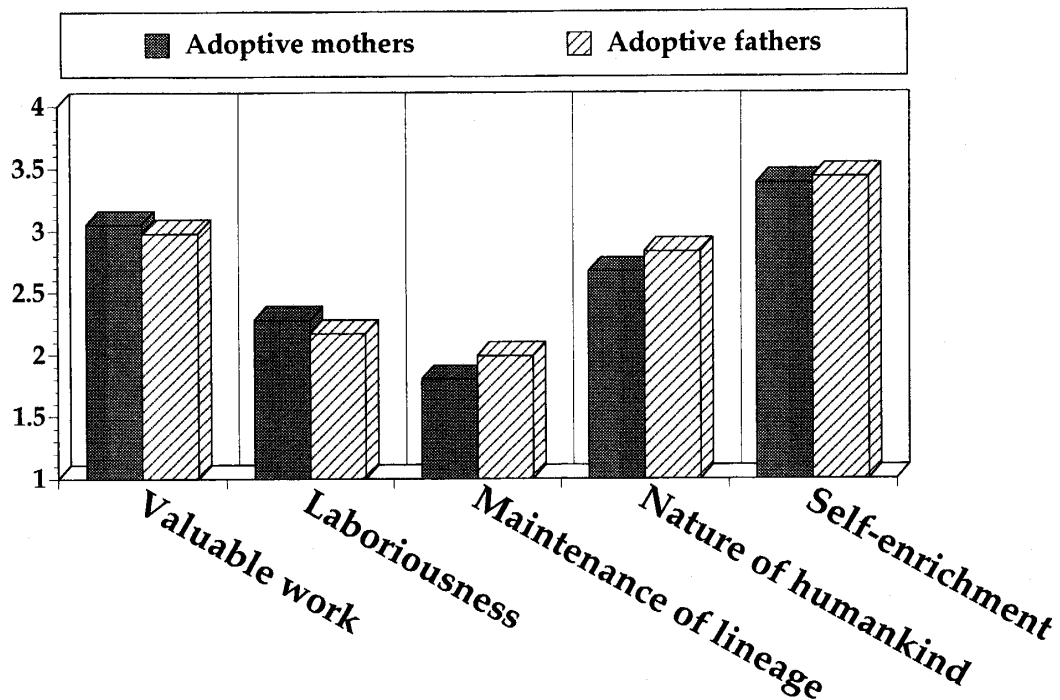


Fig. 5. Five factors of parental beliefs in adoptive mothers and adoptive fathers.

Table 10. Rank order correlation between marital relations and parental beliefs.

	Valuable work	Laboriousness	Self-enrichment
Closeness	—	—	—
	.325*	-.479**	.326*
Acceptance	.376**	—	—
	.298*	—	—
Positive regard	—	-.306*	—
	—	—	.336*

Note: Upper: Mother, Lower: Father.

Discussion

Above all adoptive parents showed relatively better marital relations than birth parents. We could understand that the sophisticated marital relations in adoptive couples was built up by their life experiences after their marriage and assumed three following reasons: (1) almost all adoptive parents in this study had decided to bring up their adopted child after suffering their long-term treatment for infertility, (2) The agency obliged the anticipated adoptive parents to participate in several workshops to discuss their marital relations and decisions of adoption, and (3) adoptive parents have made efforts to understand each other in their life after placing their adopted child. Husband's contributions are especially effective toward higher marital relations in adoptive

parents. Significant higher scores on acceptance and positive regard for spouse in the case of fathers indicate this. In general it might be concluded that adoptive fathers are very eager to build positive and close relations with their spouse.

We found in this study that adoptive mothers place great value on their child-rearing, whereas birth mothers perceive their child-rearing as a burden. Adoptive mothers typically experience a long period of waiting and looking forward to nurturing a child before actual child-rearing begins. On the other hand, it seems that birth mothers often find child-rearing to be repetitive, regardless of changes as the child grows, because they have continuously faced their child day after day since giving birth. Thus they were likely to perceive their child-rearing as to be a burden.

Another difference in parental beliefs on child-rearing between adoptive mothers and birth mothers was the perceived importance of kinship. Birth mothers understood that children are necessary for protecting the family lineage, whereas adoptive mothers believed that children were a separate existence from them. This can be related to the dichotomy between traditional and non-traditional/progressive understanding of the family. In the traditional way of thinking, the purpose of child-rearing is to avoid the extinction of kinship. On the other hand, in progressive thinking, the purpose is to bring up the person as an individual, and kinship is not important.

Finally we found several correlations between marital relations and parental beliefs on child-rearing in adoptive parents. Adoptive fathers having better marital relations with their spouse—psychological closeness, acceptance and positive regard for their wives—tended to estimate their child-rearing as valuable work and found it to be enjoyable and psychologically enriching. Adoptive mothers showed similar tendencies as well. That is, those having better marital relations with their spouse—acceptance and positive regard for their husband—tended to understand their child-rearing as valuable and enjoyable work. These findings verify that both marital relations and child-rearing beliefs are closely related in the case of adoptive parents.

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